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Agenda

• What’s Going On With Our Students
• Understanding the Challenges – The Chinese Example
• Seeking Care
• Programming That Works
• Resources
• Discussion & Questions
What’s Going On?

56.7% Diagnosed
Up from 48% in 2013

(NIMH 2013, 2017)

(ACHA, Spring 2013, Fall 2017)
Mental Health Need, Awareness, and Use of Counseling Services Among International Graduate Students, Journal of American College Health

Source: Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lusting, 2010
Understanding the Challenges

The Chinese Example
51% of international students come from China and India.

Open Doors is conducted by the Institute of International Education with the support of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. Online at: www.iie.org/opendoors
Case Example

- 25-year-old Chinese international student; second year of doctoral program

- “Disappeared” from classes; no response to emails or phone calls

- Advisor eventually walks her to your office

- “I’ve had problems in my classes and been sick recently. I need more time for assignments but don’t feel I can ask for it. I was a top student in China and am ashamed of my performance, so I’ve been avoiding my advisor. I don’t want to worry anyone else about my problems.”
Chinese, Studying in America, and Struggling

By HELEN GAO  DEC 12, 2017

The New York Times
26岁中国留学生斯坦福大学自杀身亡：天之骄子背后的压力究竟有多可怕？

最近霍天临“学术不端”事件闹得沸沸扬扬，与此同时，博士所面临的压力也逐渐被大众所知晓——写论文做实验、整日熬得掉头发...就在2月11日，斯坦福一名材料科学与工程系的博士用自杀告别了这个世界，根据警方确认其为26岁的中国留学生，我们只看到了表面的光鲜亮丽，殊不知他们背后经历了多少无助与痛苦...学霸君真心希望无论是申请党还是已经在国外就读的留学生都要关注自己的心理健康，学霸君理解你们的压力，希望你们可以照顾好自己。
Chinese students under mental pressure overseas

The sign hanging above the desk of Xiao Lu, a Chinese student at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, read “Perseverance prevails. Never give up.” The 28-year-old seemed to have a bright future ahead after finishing his MBA at one of the best business schools in the U.S. and returning home.

But Lu’s life ended in the icy waters of Lake Michigan earlier this year. A police investigation found no evidence of homicide, and that instead he chose a higher spot at the lakeside before ending his own life, reported the World Journal newspaper.

Lu’s mother told media nothing seemed to be wrong when she and her son talked on video chat three days before his death.

Lu’s tragedy is not an isolated one.

In recent years, as the Chinese upper class has gotten richer, many parents have chosen to send their children abroad. Statistics from Open Door Data show the number of Chinese students studying in the U.S. surpassed 300,000 in 2015.

But Lu’s has not been the only suicide. Li Yangkai, 20, who studied at Johns Hopkins University, jumped from the roof of his apartment building one year ago, after suffering from insomnia and depression. Lin Xu, a 22-year-old student at California State University in Fullerton, jumped from a five-storey building in his school after failing to complete a language project.
ALIENATION 101

There were hopes that the flood of Chinese students into America would bring the countries closer. But a week at the University of Iowa suggested to Brook Larmer that the opposite may have happened.
Common Stressors

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xj3TYYmLG0G
Common Stressors

Communication Styles
- Verbal vs. non-verbal
- High-context vs. low-context

Second language anxiety
- Daily routine
- Communicating with professors, classmates, roommates
- Asking for help

Career Planning
- Finances
- Area of Study Planning

Identity
- Acculturation
- Social Class Discrimination

Interpersonal
- Boundaries
- Peer Pressure
- Parental Expectations

Academic
- Formal vs. informal classroom
- Presentation/participation styles
- Outcome vs. process oriented

"Like many Chinese students, she was a city girl in a country town. 'I wondered where the subway was.'"

"Chinese students who return with an American degree, known in China as 'sea turtles,' used to be all but guaranteed an accelerated career path in China."

"I hate how the Asians here talk in the library and cheat on their tests. Like get the f--k out."

"For many Chinese students, the language barrier can be tough to overcome, and culturally, it's simply more comfortable to cluster together. But the largely monolingual American students don't make much effort, either."

"Haddy's professor has already warned her about the improper use of footnotes and borrowed text – academic niceties unfamiliar to Chinese kids taught at home to regurgitate facts for their exams."

"Haddy has never felt comfortable participating in the more decadent rites of American university life – the frat parties and binge-drinking."

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Common Psychological Challenges

1. Separation from parents
2. Face and shame
3. Clash of cultures
4. Identity formation
1. Separation from Parents

- Confucian view of child’s role (Root -> Grass -> Tree)
- Support vs. expectation, boundaries/separation
- “Compensation syndrome”

Chen J, Liu L. Sampan. 9/5/14.
2. Face and Shame

• “Face” (面子/臉)

• “Men cannot live without shame. A sense of shame is the beginning of integrity.”– Mencius (孟子)

• Focus on external and comparisons

• Shame linked to suicide

Success at what cost?

- Perfectionistic cognitive distortions (unhelpful thinking styles)
- Black and white thinking
- Asian American students with perfectionistic thinking more vulnerable to depression
- Modeled by rigid expectations from parents

Much more research is needed!
Barriers to Treatment

- Belief that depression and anxiety are personal weaknesses rather than illnesses
- Emotional inhibition rather than expression
- Low awareness of services and help-seeking
- Language/cultural barriers
- Role of psychiatry in many Asian countries
- Stigma/shame

Culture and Mental Health Stigma

- Mental illness is highly stigmatized in Chinese culture (~ psychosis)
- Implications for marriage
- “Neurasthenia” (神经衰弱)
- Emphasis on somatic rather than psychological symptoms
家丑不可外扬

"Don't air your dirty laundry in public."
Differences in Presentation

- May not acknowledge depressed mood
- Increased somatic complaints
- Avoidance, procrastination, academic decline (?)
- Cross-cultural bridge: “Stress” (压力)


Emerging Issues

- Video game/Internet addiction
- Eating disorders
- Herbal supplements
- Social media
- Limited therapy resources on campus
Case Example, Cont’d

- “Very overwhelmed”; not sleeping or eating well for weeks
- “What if I don’t need to worry about all these difficulties anymore?”
- Homesick, isolated, but did not tell parents
- “Has never had counseling before. “Why would talking to someone help me? And will it go on my record?”
Seeking Care
Ways to Support Mental Health

Front line staff ———— to Counselling Service
Observe and Approach

- Noticing difficulties
- Acknowledging and asking
- Being patient and being willing to listen
Observe and Approach

- Somatic vs. psychological focus
- Seeking consultation
When to Refer?

- Deterioration in Personal Hygiene or Dress
- Dramatic Weight Loss or Gain
- Noticeable Changes in Mood
- Excessive Absences
- Academic Problems
- Social Isolation and Unusual Behaviors
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Threat of Harm to Themselves or Others
Common Mental Health Myths

Counseling is for crazy people.

"Everyone will know I saw a counselor."

Only someone from my home country will understand my problem.

I can handle my own mental health problems. If I can’t, that means I'm weak.

I could lose my visa status.
Addressing Myths

- Emphasizing it is a sign of strength
- Explaining confidentiality
  - Not on school record/transcript
  - Friends, family and sponsor will not know
- Won’t affect visa status
- Cultural competency – counselors are trained to be open, knowledgeable, and skillful
How to Refer

- Introducing counseling
- Make the call or walk in together
- Make no assumptions and ask their provider preference
- Build a relationship with the Counseling Center
After the Counselling Center

- Set a reminder to follow-up with the student
- Ask questions about the meeting
- Be sure to listen for barriers
- Encourage to go consistently
- Counseling is voluntary
Current Trends

- “Third culture kid”: not belonging to everywhere, identity crisis
- Race issue
- Job search stress: not a welcoming environment
- Vacation isolation: especially after travel ban
- Changing resources on campus
Programming That Works
Building the Trust

Creating the Connection

• Include mental health and counseling information pre-departure
• Introduce counseling/wellness initiatives
• Testimonials from current students
Mental Health in Orientation

- Inform students of challenges and cultural adjustment
- Invite counseling center or other mental health professionals
- Educate students about campus/community resources
- Parent and partner programs
- Train peer leaders and mentors about these issues to help guide students
Programming That Helps

• Buddy/Peer mentor programs
• Workshops (e.g., “Decoding U.S. Culture”, “Lost in Translation”, “Culture Shock”)
• “Let’s Talk” Drop-in Hours
• University 101-type courses
• Social organizations/student clubs
• Summer/Holiday programs
• Friendship family programs
• Discussion/Support Groups
• Creative initiates (e.g., “Welcome to My World Photo Exhibition”)

How to Reduce Stigma

• Dispel the myths
• Know the facts about cultural differences around counseling
• Invite on-campus counselors/psychologists to orientation and meet & greet opportunities
• Educate counselors/psychologists on how to communicate across cultures
• Give testimonials even anonymously, and perhaps in their native language
• Normalize students’ concerns and stress
• Creative ways of introducing counseling
Culture of Care

In the International Office

Advisors support students with counseling skills, including:

- Demonstrating empathy
- Reflecting and paraphrasing
- Asking open questions & building rapport
- Keep a professional code of public silence
- Learn how to pronounce names correctly
Culture of Care

In the International Office

In difficult conversations:

- Consider student’s reaction v. discomfort delivering news
- Don’t avoid because it’s uncomfortable (ex: suicide)
- Be positive

Planning Ahead:

- Know whom to call and how to behave

Training:

- Step up bystander intervention trainings
- Campus connect training for suicide prevention
Building Bridges

Mental Health outside of the mental health sphere

- Depression screening at Student Health Center
- Establishing a knowledge-sharing community (know your partners)
- Highlight counseling center events through newsletters, social media, etc.
- Know the services offered around campus, and form connection
  - Chapel
  - Ombudsperson Office
  - Dean of Students
  - Child and Family Studies
Emotional Wellness Training

In partnership with:

Powerpoint Presentation
Video Content
Student Handout
Interactive Activities
Proctor Guide

Download online at https://www.internationalstudentinsurance.com/school-resources/mental-health-awareness-training/

In partnership with:

The MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness

International Student Insurance
Emotional wellness is the ability to be aware of our feelings and accept them. It means having an optimistic approach, and is a key part of long-term success and happiness.

https://www.internationalstudentinsurance.com/explained/mental-health.php
Emotional Wellness Consortium

- A year-long virtual institute that supports university and secondary school staff in enhancing international student mental health
- Strong focus on partnership with expert clinicians and cultivating a community of like-minded professionals
- [www.mghstudentwellness.org/consortium](http://www.mghstudentwellness.org/consortium)

"With increasing numbers of international and domestic students of Asian heritage choosing our school, the partnership with the Consortium has been invaluable."
—Adria Pavletic, Director of Health Services, St. Mark’s School

We have an average member satisfaction score of 6.5 / 7

Monthly lecture-discussions led by Center clinicians
Confidential case discussion about anonymized students
Exclusive opportunities for partnership with the Center, tailored to your needs

The MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness Consortium

MGH General Hospital

Harvard Medical School Affiliate
Resources

NAFSA Resources
Now Available: Addressing Mental Health Issues Affecting International Students
Crisis Management in a Cross Cultural Setting: ISSS

Other Resources
Tufts University Counseling and Mental Health Service
Information for international students regarding counseling
Services & Hotlines

Hotlines

- National Suicide Prevention (1-800-273-TALK)
  - www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE)
  - http://www.thehotline.org/
- It Gets Better Project, LGBTQ (1-866-4-U-TREVOR)
  - www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/get-help

Services

Questions

“International students who reported a more functional relationship with their advisors were less likely to report having an emotional or stress-related problem in the past year.”

(Source: Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lusting, 2010)
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